

Who better to employ the CAP Concept than Reconnaissance Units?

Subject Area Strategic Issues

EWS 2006

**Who better to employ the CAP Concept than Reconnaissance Units?**

Contemporary Issues Paper  
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7 February 2006

<b>Report Documentation Page</b>			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188		
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1. REPORT DATE <b>07 FEB 2006</b>	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-2006 to 00-00-2006</b>			
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> <b>Who better to employ the CAP Concept than Reconnaissance Units?</b>			5a. CONTRACT NUMBER		
			5b. GRANT NUMBER		
			5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b>			5d. PROJECT NUMBER		
			5e. TASK NUMBER		
			5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> <b>United States Marine Corps,Command Staff College Marine Corps University,2076 South Street, Marine Corps Combat Development Command,Quantico,VA,22134-5068</b>			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER		
<b>9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b>			10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)		
			11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)		
<b>12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>					
<b>13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b>					
<b>14. ABSTRACT</b>					
<b>15. SUBJECT TERMS</b>					
<b>16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:</b>			<b>17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b> <b>Same as Report (SAR)</b>	<b>18. NUMBER OF PAGES</b> <b>9</b>	<b>19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b>
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

According to Lieutenant General James Mattis, "the greatest probability is the rise of so called irregular challengers. . . insurgency (among other things) . . . will challenge United States security interests globally.<sup>1</sup> With these comments from the General the Marine Corps will have to adjust its employment methods. The mindset for training our troops for this type of warfare is different than preparing for conventional engagements. Therefore, it is imperative that the United States military attain the ability to operate smartly, independently, and decisively on an asymmetrical battlefield. The Combined Action Platoon (CAP) concept has displayed some success when facing "irregular challenges", but the right men need to be chosen for such missions. Because they have the training, equipment, and maturity needed to be successful in this type of environment, reconnaissance platoons are best suited to apply the Combined Action Platoon (CAP) concept in Iraq.

In Vietnam, Third Battalion, Fourth Marines were successful in combining South Vietnamese Popular Forces (PF's) and effectively defending within their Area of Responsibility (AOR). "Out of this combined action of PFs and Marines living and fighting in the local villages evolved the Combined Action Platoons (CAP). The Marines expanded the battalion's concept,

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<sup>1</sup> LtGen James Mattis and LtCol John Hoffman. "Future Warfare: The Rise of Hybrid Wars" Proceedings, November 2005, Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute, p 54-55

tested, evaluated it and found it to be effective in eliminating VC influence and control of the local village.”<sup>2</sup> Over the next couple of years the CAP concept evolved and specific guidance was established for recruiting Marines for these types of missions. According to the guidelines in order to be eligible for CAP-type missions Marines must: (1) Have been in country for at least two months if on first tour or have served a previous tour, (2) Have a minimum of six months remaining on current tour or agree to extend to meet this requirement (3) Volunteer and be motivated to live and work with the Vietnamese people (4) Be a mature, motivated Marine and recommended by his commanding officer (5) Have had no non-judicial punishment and no courts-martial within the past year (6) Have an average 4.0 mark in conduct and proficiency with last marks at least 4.0 (7) Have not received more than one purple heart award on current tour, and (8) Preferably be a high school graduate.<sup>3</sup>

Within the reconnaissance community all 0321/9953s are carefully screened, and in order to be approved for a reconnaissance unit a Marines must have a 105 General Technical (GT), be a Combat Water Survival (CWS) First Class qualified, have a first class PFT (usually 285 or above), and a letter of recommendation from the Commanding Officer. These are just some

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<sup>2</sup> Maj Brooks R. Brewington. “Combined Action Platoons: A Strategy for Peace Enforcement”. CSC 1996, Strategic Issues, p 9.

<sup>3</sup> Maj Brooks R. Brewington. “Combined Action Platoons: A Strategy for Peace Enforcement”. CSC 1996, Strategic Issues, p 17.

of the prerequisites needed to get approved to go to a reconnaissance unit. Because of these strict prerequisites a certain type of Marine is selected. He is mature, smart, and very capable of acting independently which is exactly the type of individual you need within a Combined Action Platoon.

While 1<sup>st</sup> MARDIV applied the CAP concept with some success during OIF II there is still much room for improvement. Captain Danner (former CAP Officer in Charge) explains, "Our CAP platoon was made up of 1/2 of an 81mm Section. I had 16 Marines (including me) and a Corpsman. Half of the Marines were guys I had in 81s for OIF I. The rest were new joins. I had one NCO, a Corporal. The Doc was a newbie, but hard as nails and knew his medicine (he's just completed BUDS)." <sup>4</sup> Although he and his men did a tremendous job one cannot help think that Reconnaissance Marines, with their specialized training, would have been a better fit for this type of mission.

From a Table of Organization (T/O) perspective, Reconnaissance Platoons contain one officer, twenty-one enlisted, and one Navy Special Amphibious Reconnaissance. Special Amphibious Reconnaissance Corpsman (SARC) training, which teaches hyperbaric medicine combined with six months of Joint Special Operations Medical training provides

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<sup>4</sup> E-mail from Capt Matthew Danner, November 28, 2005.

reconnaissance platoons with an increased medical capability when compared to standard infantry companies. The addition of a Navy SARC to reconnaissance platoons is useful when conducting missions where there is no close medical treatment center, or when CASEVAC cannot be provided.

Currently in Iraq, the reconnaissance battalions and infantry battalions are conducting the same missions. However, employing reconnaissance units as Combined Action Platoons would allow for a better economy of force for the commanders. Captain Brock Bahe, former Alpha Company Commander for 3D Reconnaissance Battalion states, "Our T/E supports the CAP concept due to the advanced communications, especially the Man-packed Secondary Imagery Dissemination Systems (MPSIDS)."<sup>5</sup> Each team has the MPSIDS with the bay station located back at the platoon/company Reconnaissance Operations Center (ROC). This allows photographs and written reports to move up and down the chain of command with ease. Each man within a reconnaissance platoon carries a PRC-148, which is capable of Very High Frequency (VHF) / Ultra high Frequency (UHF) communication, along with a PRC-117 (High Frequency radio), and there is a PSC-5 (Satellite Communications radio) per platoon. Capt Danner recalls some of the equipment his CAP had available, "Our typical rifle squad gear (M16A2)

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<sup>5</sup> Discussion with Capt Brock Bahe who was Alpha Company Commander, 3D Reconnaissance Bn during Operation Iraqi Freedom III.

plus two medium machineguns. I had three or four guys with M16A4s and ACOGs. I had three highback HMMWVs. For comm I had three PRC-119s, an EPLRs radio for talking to Battalion, and the Iridium phone. The police station we lived at also had a telephone line that worked half the time and that we could get Battalion on if needed (the Civil Affairs shop).<sup>6</sup> Infantry battalions are structured to fight in a conventionally, and what seemingly might be little gear provided to this CAP in all actuality it is decreasing this infantry battalion's ability to fight as a battalion. On the other hand, reconnaissance battalions are not designed to fight as a battalion's, but rather in teams with the right equipment to support them. They are far more adaptable to successfully conducting CAP missions.

The standard training that 0321s receive also makes them more desirable for these types of missions. For example, currently all reconnaissance personnel conducting missions in Iraq are required to have *Survive, Evade, Resist, Escape* (*SEREs*) training. The course is designed to give students the skill to survive and evade capture or, if captured, to resist interrogation or exploitation and plan their escape. It is broken down into three phases: 1) Classroom instruction 2) Field and survival phase 3) Resistance Training Laboratory (RTL). All "high-risk personnel" are required to graduate this school prior

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<sup>6</sup> E-mail from Capt Matthew Danner, November 28, 2005

to conducting combat operations. This is just another advantage to having Reconnaissance Marines who will be isolated and embedded within foreign military forces where there is greater risk of capture.

Major Tom Savage noted that, in order to be successful, "These (infantry) battalions have to be heavy in mobility, communications, and fire support, which would be used to augment the capabilities of their dispersed and isolated CAP platoons, with a different set of Mission Performance Standards which would focus on small unit tactics, combined arms, training the trainers, cultural awareness, and language skills."<sup>7</sup> Small unit tactics and combined arms capabilities are reconnaissance battalions' cornerstones, but language skills and cultural awareness is something the military as a whole lacks to date. The Defense Language Institute (DLI) needs to come up with an immersion program available for Marines for three to six months prior to deployment. Even a rudimentary understanding of the enemy's language could pay dividends while conducting missions on the battlefield. Since reconnaissance Marines already are well versed in small unit tactics, they could really immerse themselves focusing developing their language skills and cultural awareness. Being able to speak the language would allow cultural barriers to be torn down. According to Robert

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<sup>7</sup> Major Savage electronic mail correspondence.

Cialdina, "Increased familiarity—through repeated contact with a person or thing is yet another factor that normally facilitates [the ability to influence] . . . one positive circumstance that may work well is mutual and successful cooperation."<sup>8</sup> By immersing ourselves in the enemy's culture, we will be more successful in developing long-lasting/trusting relationships. Without a clear picture on who are enemy is we need to rely on information attained through Iraqi citizens so the insurgents can be locate and destroy the insurgents. In the words of General Vo Nguyen Giap, commander of the North Vietnamese Army, "Without the people we have no information . . . They hide us, protect us, feed us, and tend to our wounded.<sup>9</sup> If we can take this ability away from the enemy they will have no where to hide.

There are no simple solutions when it comes to fighting an enemy that does not use conventional means. In order to be successful on the today's battlefield, Marines must adapt and configure their forces to allow them to be triumphant. Reconnaissance units should be used to employ CAP in Iraq because they are the most qualified, best equipped, and best fitted.

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<sup>8</sup> Robert B. Cialdini, ph.D. Influence. New York: Quill, 1993, pp 167-208.

<sup>9</sup> LtGen Victor H. Krulak. First to Fight: An Inside View of the U.S. Marine Corps. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1984, p 211.

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